

IN THE CLAIMS:

Kindly amend claims 1-16 as follows:

1. (Currently Amended) A process for producing a microgel having a mean particle size of 0.1-1,000 μm , the microgel being prepared by a process comprising:
dissolving in an aqueous solvent a hydrophilic compound capable of forming a gel,
causing the resultant mixture to form a gel, and
pulverizing the gel into a microgel having a mean particle size of 0.1-1,000 μm .
2. (Currently Amended) A microgel having a mean particle size of 0.1-1,000 μm , the microgel being prepared by a The process according to claim 1, wherein the comprising dissolving in an aqueous solvent a hydrophilic compound capable of forming a gel and a viscosity increasing compound incapable of forming a gel, causing the resultant mixture to form a gel, and pulverizing the gel into a microgel having a mean particle size of 0.1-1,000 μm are dissolved in the aqueous solvent.
3. (Currently Amended) The process according to microgel of claim 2 1, wherein the viscosity increasing compound incapable of forming a gel is one or more viscosity increasing compounds hydrophilic compound capable of forming a gel is one or more hydrophilic compounds selected from the group consisting of xanthan gum, succinoglycan, polyacrylic acid, polyethylene glycol, polyacrylamide, and a polyalkylacrylamide/polyacrylamide copolymer agar, carageenan gum, curdlan, gelatin, gellan gum, and alginic acid.
4. (Currently Amended) The microgel process according to of claim 1, wherein the viscosity increasing hydrophilic compound capable incapable of forming a gel is one or more viscosity increasing hydrophilic compounds selected from the group consisting of agar, carrageenan, curdlan,

gelatin, gellan gum, and alginic acid xanthan gum, succinoglycan, polyacrylic acid, polyethylene glycol, polyacrylamide, and a polyalkylacrylamide/polyacrylamide copolymer.

5. (Currently Amended) The process according to microgel of claim 1, which has a viscosity of 2,000-1,000,000 mPa·s (B-type viscometer, 25°C) wherein the gel is pulverized into a microgel having a mean particle size of 1 to 300 µm.

6. (Currently Amended) A The process according to claim 1, for producing a microgel having a mean particle size of 0.1-1,000 µm, which process comprises dissolving in an aqueous solvent a hydrophilic compound capable of forming a wherein the gel, causing the resultant mixture to form a gel, and pulverizing the gel into a microgel having a mean particle size of 0.1-1,000 µm has a viscosity of 2,000-1,000,000 mPa·s (B-type viscometer, 25°C).

7. (Currently Amended) A process for producing a microgel having a mean particle size of 0.1-1,000 µm, an external composition, which said process comprising comprises:

dissolving in an aqueous solvent a hydrophilic compound capable of forming a gel and a viscosity increasing compound incapable of forming a gel,

causing the resultant mixture to form a gel, and

pulverizing the gel into a microgel having a mean particle size of 0.1-1,000 µm; and

mixing the microgel with a pharmaceutical ingredient and/or a salt to obtain the external composition.

8. (Currently Amended) The external composition comprising a microgel of process according to claim 4-7, wherein the pharmaceutical ingredient is one or more pharmaceutical ingredients selected from the group consisting of vitamins, anti-inflammatory agents, antibacterial agents, and whitening ingredients.

9. (Currently Amended) The external composition of process according to claim 8, further comprising a wherein the pharmaceutical ingredient and/or a salt is one or more whitening ingredients selected from the group consisting of L-ascorbic acid, an L-ascorbic acid derivative, arbutin, glutathione, tranexamic acid, a tranexamic acid derivative, a placenta extract, and a vegetable extract exhibiting whitening effect.

10. (Currently Amended) The external composition of process according to claim 9, wherein the pharmaceutical ingredient is a whitening ingredient external composition contains 0.1 to 20 mass% of the pharmaceutical ingredient and/or the salt.

11. (Currently Amended) The external composition to process according to claim 10, wherein the whitening ingredient is one or more whitening ingredients selected from the group consisting of L-ascorbic acid, an L-ascorbic acid derivative, arbutin, glutathione, tranexamic acid, a tranexamic acid derivative, a placenta extract, and a vegetable extract exhibiting whitening effect external composition is a cosmetic composition.

12. (Currently Amended) The external composition of claim 9, wherein the amount of the pharmaceutical ingredient and/or the salt is 0.01-20 mass % of the total of the composition.

13. (Currently Amended) The external composition of process according to claim 8, which is a cosmetic composition wherein the hydrophilic compound capable of forming a gel and a viscosity increasing compound incapable of forming a gel are dissolved in the aqueous solvent.

14. (Currently Amended) The external composition of process according to claim 8, which is a hair dye wherein the hydrophilic compound capable of forming a gel is one or more hydrophilic compounds selected from the group consisting of agar, carrageenan, curdlan, gelatin, gellan gum, and alginic acid.

15. (Currently Amended) The microgel of process according to claim 2 7, wherein the hydrophilic viscosity increasing compound capable incapable of forming a gel is one or more hydrophilic viscosity increasing compounds selected from the group consisting of agar, carrageenan, eurdlan, gelatin, gellan gum, and alginic acid xanthan gum, succinoglycan, polyacrylic acid, polyethylene glycol, polyacrylamide, and a polyalkylacrylamide/polyacrylamide copolymer.

16. (Currently Amended) The microgel of process according to claim 2 7, which has a viscosity of 2,000-1,000,000 mPa·s (B-type viscometer, 25°C) wherein the gel is pulverized into a microgel having a mean particle size of 1 to 300 μm.

Kindly add new claim 17 as follows:

17. (New) The process according to claim 7, wherein the gel has a viscosity of 2,000-1,000,000 mPa·s (B-type viscometer, 25°C).